

# THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Newsletter of the Flint River Astronomy Club  
Vol. 8, No. 9 November, 2004

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**Bill Warren** if you have a change of home address, telephone no. or e-mail address.

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**Club Calendar. Sun., Nov. 7-Sun., Nov. 14:**

Chiefland (Fla.) Star Party; **Tues., Nov. 9:**

Beaverbrook PTA observing (7:15 p.m., behind the school); **Fri.-Sat., Nov. 12-13:** Cox Field observings

(at dark); **Thurs., Nov. 18:** FRAC meeting (BB media center, 7:30 p.m.).

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**President's Message.** I hope you'll note carefully the change in meeting date in this month's Club Calendar. While we normally schedule our club meetings for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of every month, the week-long **Chiefland Star Party**, running from Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>-Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>, has put a crimp in our short-term plans.

It's not that we regard our Nov. meeting as unimportant, but many of our members (including me and most of the other officers) regard our twice-a-year trips to Chiefland, Fla., as pilgrimages to what is arguably the finest observing site in the entire eastern U. S. Couple that with the friendliness of the folks down there and the opportunity to rub shoulders with some of the biggest names in southeastern astronomy, and you have a situation that is downright irresistible to many FRACsters.

That's why, instead of holding our club meeting on Thurs., Nov. 11<sup>th</sup>, as normally scheduled, we're moving it back a week to **Thurs., Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>**. The time – 7:30 p.m. – and place (Beaverbrook media center) will be the same, but please be sure to mark the **18th** on your calendar in bold print and underline it twice, so you won't find yourself sitting in the BB parking lot on the wrong date and wondering when everyone else is gonna arrive. It'll be a very long wait.

**-Steven (Saratoga Smitty, a.k.a. "The Astronomy Guy") Smith**

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**Membership Renewals Due in November:** None.

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. Fifteen FRAC members and a guest hosted a Cox Field observing for 20 boy scouts and 65 cub scouts, their scoutmasters and parents, on Sept. 25<sup>th</sup>. A gibbous moon limited what else could be seen that evening, but we answered questions regarding the various astronomy merit

badge requirements and told the boys how to perform the required tasks. Our participants included **John Wallace, Felix Luciano, Mike Stuart, Steve & Dawn Knight, Joe Auriemma, Chuck Sims, Smitty, Little Smitty** (Steven Jr., who ain't so little anymore), **Littlest Smitty** (Josh), **Doug Maxwell, Bill Snyder, Dan Newcombe, Dave Hoover** and his guest **Mimi Kuehnstedt**, and **yr. editor**.

Steve K., who organized the event, wants to thank everyone in FRAC who helped to make the event successful.

**John ("the Night Sky Guy") Wallace** returned to Beaverbrook's "BBTV" morning news program on Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, talking about **Betelgeuse** and **Rigel** and explaining to the children how those stars' colors relate to their temperature and age.

We had 12 members at our Oct. meeting: **Smitty, Chuck Sims, Larry Fallin, John Wallace, Doug Maxwell, Felix Luciano, Curt & Irene Cole, Dr. Richard Schmude, Steve & Dawn Knight**, and **yr. editor**. Dr. Schmude's talk ("The 2003-2004 Apparition: Oval BA and the Great Red Spot") was one of the best we've ever heard, an engrossing analysis detailing the effects of the recent passing of **Jupiter's** Great Red Spot by another, smaller but potent storm system named Oval BA.

An unseasonably chilly, "meat-locker temperature" (**Smitty's** phrase) Cox Field observing on Fri., Oct. 15<sup>th</sup>, welcomed **Smitty, Doug Maxwell, John Wallace, Steve & Dawn Knight, Matt & Suzanne McEwen** and two friends, **Steve McMinn, David O'Keeffe** & family, and **Chuck Sims**.

The following evening's slightly milder temps brought **Smitty, Steve, Doug, Chuck, Matt, Chris Gibson** and **Phil Lehman** back to Cox Field. Smitty reports, "Scanning around, I stumbled upon a nice little fuzzy by **M33** and didn't see anything plotted nearby in my *Sky Atlas 2000.0*, so I asked Steve to look for it in his *Night Sky Observer's Guide*. Turned out it was **NGC 604**, a nebula within M33. That made my night; everything else was gravy. I logged the observation and even made a drawing of the star field." (*Glad you did, Smitty, because 604, an HII region of ionized hydrogen, is a Herschel II object. Only 399 more to go. -Ed.*)

To see what Smitty was referring to, see **Alan Whitman's** article, "Digging Deep in M33," in the Dec. issue of *Sky & Telescope* (pp. 92-95.)

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**Upcoming Meetings/Activities.** The week-long **Chiefland Star Party** will run from **Sun-Sun., Nov. 7<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>**. Don't go if you aren't pre-registered, because they don't accept walk-ins.

We'll be at Beaverbrook on **Tues., Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>**, to show the sky to PTA attendees who take us up on our offer. If you haven't been before, we set up in back on the E side of the school. Just follow the school driveway around to the right and you'll see us, either in the parking area on that side or behind the trailers. Plan to arrive around **7:15 p.m.**

Our club observations will be at Cox Field on **Nov. 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>**, with the new moon on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

Although we haven't scheduled club observations on other Nov. weekends due to the intrusive presence of the last-quarter, 1st-quarter and full-moon phases, respectively, on other Nov. weekends, please feel free to visit Cox Field on those weekends or during the week at any time during the month. (For that matter, please don't overlook our Nov. 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Cox Field observations just because some of our members will be at Chiefland during that week.)

Our FRAC meeting will be on **Thurs., Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>**, at **7:30 p.m.** in the BB media center.

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**This 'n That.** From our "'Tis a Far, Far Better Place/Than I Have Ever Been" Dept. comes the following e-mail from **Tom Moore** dated 10/11/04:

"I may have told you already, but I really don't care if I did or not, because I'm going to tell you again. (Bragging is fun sometimes.) I won't be able to attend our Oct. meeting because I will be attending Astronomy Camp in Arizona. I will be thinking of FRAC while I'm gazing through the 40" and 60" telescopes on Mt. Lemmon under crystal-clear skies.

"As part of the camp, I will be required to go to Kitt Peak for more observing – tough break, huh? – under the tutelage of the aspiring professional

astronomer **Katie Moore** and her sidekick **Dr. Don McCarthy**, astronomy professor at the Univ. of Arizona. Is there anything (in the sky) that I might photograph for you while using the CCD camera-equipped telescopes that I will have access to three nights in a row?

“Everything is not perfect, though. I had hoped to complete my Lunar observations during my stay at a place with better-than-perfect observing conditions, but...it is that time of the month: P.M.S. (Pre-Moonal Syndrome.) The new-moon phase won't be complete until after camp is over, darn it!

“So here's to FRAC! Clear skies, top down, green lights, cold beer and all that other good stuff,

“-Tom, the Happy Astronomer

“P. S.: Remember what **Jack Horkheimer** says: ‘Keep looking up!’ (To which I add, *Watch what you are stepping in while you are looking up!*)”

\*Not to be outdone, **Scott Hammonds** and his wife **Alisa** were in New Mexico, revisiting the site where Scott took some pretty good (according to him) astrophotos last spring that the rest of us, in our ignorance, considered to be at least three stages beyond excellent.

Scott writes, “Well, here I am at 7,300 ft., clear skies and lots of stars. My cameras are imaging the **California Nebula (NGC 1499 in Perseus)** and a wide-field **Milky Way**. I have been given a free night on the 30” Dob with Sky Commander, and it's great. Wish the whole club could be here looking at **Steve's** favorite, **NGC 891** (*a large, edge-on spiral galaxy in Andromeda that is notorious for its disappointing faintness. –Ed.*), dust lanes and all. Amazing.”

Of course, those of us back home while Tom, Scott & Alisa were enjoying the pristine skies of the American southwest hoped that they might avoid Hurricane Xanthippe, bearing down on them with the determination of a 2,000-lb. bovine during the annual “Running of the Bulls” in Pamplona, Spain. (We made up that last part about the hurricane, but the sentiment, at least, was real. Hey, the least they could have done was invite us along -- all expenses paid, of course -- to experience those mag. 7 skies!)

\*In case you ever wondered, here are the distances to Cox Field (a) from the 4-lane Griffin Bypass: 9.9 mi.; (b) from the BP station in downtown Williamson: 4.6 mi.; (c) from the Phillips 66 station: 1.9 mi.; (d) from the paved Beek's Road intersection: 1 mi.; and (e) from Turner Rd. at the highway: 0.8 mi.

\*From the Nov. '04 issue of *Sky & Telescope* (p. 130) comes a simple yet ingenious way of determining the Moon's phase (days since the last new moon) for any given day in the years 2000-2009:

“Add up the digits of the year and multiply their sum by 11;

“To this, add the number of the month and the day;

“Subtract multiples of 30 until the result is less than 30.” The number you end up with is the Moon's age in days (with the new moon being zero).

For example, for **Nov. 27, 2004**, you'd multiply **6** (2+0+0+4) X **11** to get **66**. Adding **11** (for November) and **27** (for the 27<sup>th</sup>) to that total gives you the number **104**. Subtracting multiples of 30 (104-30 = 74-30 = 44-30) yields **14**. So the Moon should be 14 days past the new moon of Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> – and *presto!*, the 2-week-old Moon will be full on Nov. 26<sup>th</sup>!

This formula was devised by **Sean Barton**, the same fellow who created the “Lunawheel,” a lunar equivalent of a planisphere. The “Hobby Q&A” segment was written and edited by **Roger W. Sinnott**.

\*In that same “Hobby Q&A” column, **Sue French** suggests a cheap dew cap to protect your finderscope from dewing over on humid evenings: “a simple tissue stuffed into the light shield (*i.e., the lens end of the finder. –Ed.*)” Not only will the tissue prevent heat in the shield from escaping (which causes dewing), it will also absorb whatever moisture is already in the finder. And best of all, she points out, “If the anti-dewing device gets soggy, toss it; you have a hundred more in the box.”

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**The Sky in November.** The two brightest planets, **Venus** (mag. -4.0) and **Jupiter** (mag. -1.7) will be

“morning stars” in Nov. On the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, they will be about ¾ degree apart in the E sky.

At 11:24 a.m. on Tues., Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>, a thin crescent Moon will occult (pass in front of) Jupiter. While it’s seldom easy to find planets at midday, this one should be fairly easy in binocs or a telescope: just find the Moon, and Jupiter will be there too – until it’s not, of course.

Mars (mag. 1.7) will lie 3 degrees below Venus before dawn on Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>.

Mercury (mag. -0.3) will lie very low in the SW sky during the last half of the month. You’ll need either a high vantage point or a low SW horizon to see it, though, because Mercury will be just 5 degrees above the horizon.

Saturn (mag. 0.0) will rise around 11 p.m. during early Nov. A chart on p. 64 of the Nov. ’04 issue of *Astronomy* shows where the Saturnian moons Titan (mag. 8.3) and Tethys, Dione, Rhea & Iapetus (all mag. 10) will be located during that time.

Mag. 5.8 Uranus can be seen on Nov. evenings, lying about 1-1/2 degrees W of Theta Cap. Although tiny, its bluish disk should be immediately apparent in binoculars and lovely in a telescope. A chart on p. 68 of the Nov. ’04 issue of *Sky & Telescope* will show you exactly where to look to find Uranus – and the asteroid 4 Vesta (see below) as well – throughout October, November and December.

Blue-green Neptune, equally tiny and beautiful but two magnitudes fainter than Uranus, will be about 7 degrees – one binocular field of view – W of Sigma Aqr and S of Theta Aqr on those same Nov. evenings.

Two meteor showers will peak in Nov.: the Taurids on the evening of Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> and the Leonids on the morning of Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>.

The Leonids, remnants of Comet 55P/Tempel-Tuttle, have been spectacular in their recent annual returns, but have probably played out their brilliance by now, offering at most 15-20 meteors per hour at peak.

The Taurids, remnants of Comet 2P/Encke, might display half as many meteors per hour at peak. Their best selling point is that they are one of the few meteor showers that may be as good at night as they are during the pre-dawn hours.

Comet C/2003 K4 (LINEAR) returns to the morning sky in Nov.; at mag. 5, it should be easy in binocs. A chart on p. 67 of the Nov. ’04 issue of *Astronomy* shows where to find it.

The bright asteroid 4 Vesta (mag. 7.4) will lie about 7 degrees below the triangle of stars Psi 1, 2 & 3 Aqr in Nov.

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## From Good to Fair in 90 Minutes

### observing report by Felix Luciano

*(Editor’s Note: As you know, transparency and seeing conditions have seldom been good in recent memory. Of all the qualities that have gone into making Felix a very good observer of the night sky, none has been more important than his willingness to forgo waiting for ideal observing conditions and take his ‘scopes outside on nights that many of the rest of us would stay indoors watching Cain commit unspeakable atrocities against Randy Orton on WWE wrestling, or other gripping drama or light comedy on TV.*

*It is, of course, always nice to observe under clear skies and still atmospheric conditions – but it’s also important to observe regularly. Practice doesn’t always make perfect, but it does always improve or maintain finding and observing skills.*

*As you’ll see in this observing report, Felix’s persistence and attention to detail ensure that he sees whatever the prevailing sky conditions permit him to see. In this case, the transparency and seeing started out pretty good but, over 90 minutes of observing, grew steadily poorer. He wouldn’t have known it, though, if he’d simply stayed indoors. Taking his ‘scope out on such a night gave Felix one more opportunity to pursue the same dream that impelled most of us into astronomy in the first place. His report shows the rest of us what we missed.)*

Date: Oct. 3, 2004 (8:40 p.m.-10:10 p.m. EDT).

Location: Jonesboro, Ga.

Seeing: 2 to 3.5 on the Antoniadi scale (1 perfect, 5 impossible to observe detail at any magnification).

Equipment: Orion XT8 Dobsonian (f.l. 1200), 9x50 Correct Image Right-Angle finderscope, Telrad.  
Eyepieces: 8mm, 12mm Radians; 32mm Plossl; 2.5x Powermate; and 22mm (2-inch) Nagler.

**Dumbbell Nebula (M27 in *Cygnus*).** Using my 100x (12mm Rad) eyepiece, I located the nebula fairly easily in my backyard – a large, bright, cloudy patch with the ends of its major axis denser than the central portion. Using averted vision, I saw the center as much brighter, extending from one end of the two lobes to the other and appearing as a solid line along their length.

**M71** (globular cluster in *Sagitta*). 100x showed a small, hazy, irregularly-shaped patch of light. Averted vision revealed a heavier concentration of stars toward the center and a few bright stars surrounding the cluster.

**The Great Hercules Cluster (M13).** Using the 2.5x Powermate and 214x (12mm Rad) eyepiece on the large, roundish globular cluster, I found an extremely heavy concentration of stars at and around the center. Loose groups of stars surrounded the center, some of them seen as arms or strings of stars (pearls) extending to the outer edges of the cluster. Averted vision showed many blue and white stars.

**M92** (globular cluster in *Hercules*). This globular cluster was seen at 150x (8mm Rad) as a large, round ball with a very dense center and its edges less concentrated, with loose members producing a halo surrounding the core. Averted vision showed a very dense, bright core with a fuzzy glow surrounding it.

**61 Cygni.** At 150x, the main component of this familiar, bright double star was yellowish, its companion whitish. (Both of them should have been orange, or at least golden-yellow; their faded-out appearance was due to poor transparency. Nevertheless, they were very easy to locate in the 9x50 finderscope.)

**The Blinking Planetary (NGC 6826 in *Cygnus*).** At 150x, this famous planetary nebula was a fuzzy patch

of light with a halo surrounding the central star and a much fainter (mag. 12.5) star just beyond the halo. With the seeing getting worse, I could barely make the nebula blink in and out by switching back and forth between direct and averted vision.

**Ring Nebula (M57, a planetary nebula in *Lyra*).** I could not bring the Ring into sharp focus at any magnification.

**M39** (open cluster in *Cygnus*). In my 32mm Plossl (37x), M39 was a large, wide, irregularly-shaped cluster of some 15-17 bright stars and 3-4 faint double stars around the cluster.

**M29** (open cluster in *Cygnus*). At 37x and 100x, this small open cluster featured two inward-curving rows of stars forming something like a butterfly shape, with a few fainter stars lying between them.

**The Great Nebula (Andromeda Galaxy, M31).** Looking E using my 22mm Nag (54x), I saw Andromeda Galaxy as a large, flattened-out oval patch of light with edges extending far beyond the bright oval core. Despite the poor seeing, my view of M31 was steady.

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## Observing in Ontario

### observing report by Curt Cole

Last September, my wife **Irene** and I spent 3 weeks camping in Canada and Minnesota. We crossed into Canada near Detroit and traveled counter-clockwise around the Great Lakes.

Our first stop was Algonquin Provincial Park, which is about 125 mi. N of Lake Ontario. We had hoped to spend an evening observing at the Haliburton Forest Observatory, but they didn't have observings scheduled for that night. So after visiting their Wolf Center we continued on to the park. (If you're visiting this part of Canada, you might want to look into Haliburton: they have 10" and 12" telescopes onsite, and they charge just \$12 US to use

them for an evening. You can check out Haliburton's website for additional information.)

Having studied nighttime satellite images, I knew that this area at the northern limit of North American settlements should produce some very dark skies. It's not densely populated, and the areas bordering the Great Lakes obviously would be dark toward the lakes, which extend in some directions for a few hundred miles.

We arrived in Algonquin on Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>, the day before the new moon. The only observing gear I took along was my 10x50 binoculars, my Celestron star atlas and my barn door tracker. My 10" Dob just takes up too much room to take it on a 3-week trip just for a few nights of dark skies. One of these days I may buy a smaller 'scope to take on such trips.

We camped at the Cannisbay Lake campground in the southern portion of Algonquin Park. The nearest large town was Huntsville (pop. 16,000), about 35 mi. to the WSW. We were 15 mi. from the nearest community, which was not much larger than Williamson, Ga. There were no security lights in the campground, and interior lights only at the one showerhouse. The sky was great!

We camped there for 3 nights. In this and other parks, the campgrounds were heavily forested and there was good privacy between campsites. We walked down to the lake each night and spent 2-3 hours observing. It was very quiet, and occasionally we heard loons. One night as we left for bed, a couple had a small GoTo 'scope set up in the parking lot. It was new to them and they were intent on getting it aligned, so we didn't talk to them long and didn't get to look through it.

The **Milky Way** was very detailed in my binoculars. **Andromeda Galaxy** was easy, **M33** was there for the viewing, and I saw the **North American Nebula (NGC 7000)** for the first time, too.

In estimating minimum visual magnitude, I use the definition of its being the dimmest star "easily" visible. *Easily* is a subjective term, but to me it means that, if I can only see it with averted vision, it's not easy.

Based on that, since I could make out *19 Ursae Minoris*, the skies in most of the parks we camped at

were around 5.6 transparency. Next time I'm at Cox Field I'll see what I can pick out there in comparison.

It was quite odd to see the **Big Dipper** below *Polaris* and still completely above the horizon. Remember, this was about 46 degrees N latitude – 'way up there for a Georgia boy!

I shot a dozen photos using my barn door tracker and ISO 400 print film. Exposures were generally 90-180 seconds at f/2 to f/4. The developer, unable to see the other frames, printed only two of them. Even with a magnifying glass I had trouble finding the edges of the frames on the negatives. I'd successfully taken photos at Camp McIntosh, but these skies were much darker.

As we traveled around the Great Lakes, we camped at these Provincial Parks: Awenda, Grundy Lakes, Killarney and Lake Superior. We got in some good viewing at all of them until the moon began to interfere. We saw the **Northern Lights** twice – not as colorful or as frequently as we might have liked, but rewarding sights nonetheless. Most of the campgrounds were lakeside, so we usually had good horizons in at least 2 or 3 directions. The Ontario parks department and/or Canadian campers must appreciate dark skies, because artificial lighting was almost nonexistent other than in showerhouses. All the visitor centers at the parks had astronomy books for sale – Killarney alone had 14 different titles! I've never seen anything approaching that level of interest in American parks.

We re-entered the U. S. near Grand Marais, Minn., and drove S along the North Shore of Lake Superior. We didn't do much observing here because the Moon was too high. The scenery was great, though, and we saw lots of waterfalls. We also went inland for a few days to do some hiking among the lakes of the Boundary Waters, and we took an hour-long floatplane flight one day. It's beautiful country.

In Madison, Wis., we looked around the Univ. of Wisconsin and saw the Washington Observatory. We couldn't get in the building that afternoon, although they open it periodically for public observings.

Our last stop was Chicago, where we spent most of a day in the Adler Planetarium, the oldest planetarium in the western hemisphere. We saw one of Sir

William Herschel's telescopes on display there, a refractor that must have been 6-8 feet in length. We bought a set of constellation flash cards for \$10 at Adler; they included 48 constellations, with the stars shown on one side and general information about the constellation on the other side – just the sort of thing that should prove helpful for newbies such as us in learning star patterns and configurations.

We also spent a day in the nearby Field Museum: one nice exhibit featured the astronomical mythology of the Pawnee Indians. The ceiling was festooned with stars similar to Atlanta's Fox Theater.

The southern Ontario region we visited is about 1,000 mi. N of Atlanta. That distance would also get you to west Texas. If you're going only for astronomy, the lower humidity of the southwestern U. S. might serve you better. But if you want to do other things as well, you might consider Ontario. They've got *darkness!*, not to mention the aurora borealis.

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### An Interview With Mrs. Stargazer

*Editor's Note: Having interviewed Prof. Theophilus Stargazer, the world's foremost authority on all things astronomical, on numerous occasions in the past, we thought it might be an interesting change-of-pace to interview his wife regarding what daily life with the Great Man himself is like.)*

**Ques.: Inquiring readers want to know, Mrs. Stargazer: what's it like living with the greatest astronomer the world has ever known?**

**Mrs. S.:** How should I know? Dig up Galileo's daughter and ask her. – Oh, you mean **Theo!**

Let me put it this way. He spends all night in the dark with strange men, taking pictures, and says that good photos require long exposures. He doesn't shave all winter because a beard keeps his face warm while observing. He doesn't use deodorant or aftershave lotion in warm weather because they attract insects. What woman wouldn't be thrilled by all that?

**Ques.: Surely you're exaggerating just a bit here.**

**Mrs. S.:** Don't bet on it. Hey, we're talking about a man who spends half his monthly salary on stuff to repair, maintain or upgrade his telescope, and the only home repair tools we own are WD-40 and duct tape. The last movies he took me to were "Armageddon," "Red Planet" and "Contact" – and then he spent the next two months criticizing their bad astronomy! The only TV he watches is The Weather Channel. He thinks **Seinfeld** is the guy who hosted the "Cosmos" series on PBS.

Not to mention that he's gone most of the time.

**Ques.: What's the best part of being married to Prof. Stargazer?**

**Mrs. S.:** He's gone most of the time.

**Ques.: But what about Prof. Stargazer's many revealing insights into the origins and evolution of the universe? Aren't you impressed with the magnitude of his accomplishments?**

**Mrs. S.:** I'd be more impressed if he could fix the toilet. Last time it overflowed, he told me and the kids to buy a Port-O-Let. When we complained about that, he asked me to have an affair with a plumber.

**Ques.: What do the children think of their famous father?**

**Mrs. S.:** Guido isn't famous, he's our pool boy.

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